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Supporting a Healthy Organization

Coping with Climate Anxiety

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If you are worried, anxious or even panicked about climate change, you are not alone. Mental health professionals now acknowledge that anxiety about climate change is a valid mental health issue. What some refer to as “Eco-Anxiety” is on the rise. The cause of this is exposure to ecological disasters and/or worry about future events based on information in news reports and other media.

Counselors and therapists are meeting with increasing numbers of people who are anxious about climate change. Children and young people are especially vulnerable. Teachers at all levels of the educational system witness this type of anxiety in their classrooms, and parents face it at home. Some of us are confronted with how to reassure others while trying to figure out how to cope with our own anxiety.

Anxiety about climate change is reality based, so it is not necessarily an indication that someone is unbalanced or has a mental health disorder. The vast majority of the world’s scientists who study indicators of climate say that climate change is real and at a point of crisis. Awareness of current events understandably induces great concern. Anxiety in response to actual danger is normal. Our challenge is to find an effective way to channel this into positive coping strategies.

How to best cope with climate change-related anxiety

As is the case for addressing other forms of anxiety, a healthy approach is to take constructive action rather than to dismiss, ignore, or avoid the thing that causes us to worry. The good news is that our worrying can propel us toward change and help us make a difference. There are many ways we can act to help reduce or change the

direction of the crisis, and we can support others to do the same.

The current climate crisis has multiple causes, is systemically rooted, and was created over a period of decades. Obviously, it will not be solved by individual efforts alone. This does not mean that individuals are completely helpless or off the hook when it comes to responsibility for change. There is much that each of us can and should do. In addition to individual efforts we can use our voices to affect larger systems. Instead of giving in to despair about the enormity of the situation, we can take action. This is a more adaptive and healthier way to respond.

Below are some ideas for ways to take action. These are things you can do alone or with others such as children.

1. Make changes in consumer habits.

Aim for a zero-waste life! For most of us this means making changes to some deeply ingrained habits. While this might seem inconvenient and difficult at first, living a life more aligned with

our values is empowering.

- Buy fewer goods or only what you need
- Use recycled and repurposed materials before buying new
- Repair what is broken
- Recycle what we no longer use
- Eliminate food waste
- Stop using single use plastics and so-called disposable items
- Buy local goods and cut back on goods that are shipped from far away
- Borrow and share more - starting with books from your local library



- Consume less animal protein
2. *Reduce or stop using fossil fuels used in daily transportation, travel, and heating our homes.*
This is probably the most significant way to have a

positive impact. Some ideas for how to do this include:

- Carpool to and from work
- Walk or bike to and from nearby destinations
- Use a hybrid or an electric car for personal travel
- Use public transportation options
- Eliminate or cut back on air travel
- Weatherize your home
- Research and shift over to more efficient and sustainable forms of energy for heating and power at home

3. *Plan and prepare for climate change related events.*

For people who live in a region that is vulnerable to extreme weather or other results of climate change, preparing for and having a plan for how to survive and cope in a disaster can reduce anxiety.

4. *Seek out support from and involvement with others.*

This might include joining a group or a task force in the community or even at work. Working with others can be more effective, enhance our motivation to make changes, and provide comfort through knowing that we are not alone in our efforts.

5. *Use your voice to influence larger systems such as government and political systems.*

Some ways to do this include writing to or calling your congressman and other elected officials, attending

and participating in local meetings where decisions are being made about such matters as transportation, building codes, and disposal of waste. Participating in action groups, whether at the local, national, or international level, increases our power to make a difference and helps to keep us informed.

Self-Care

In addition to taking constructive action, we need to maintain some balance and continue to

focus on other important matters in our lives. We still need to care for loved ones, contribute to the community, and attend to our responsibilities at work. Shifting our attention away from worrying about the environment at times helps us cope and stay positive. Engaging in pleasant activities and regular health-supporting practices such as exercise, good sleep, and a healthy diet also helps.

The EAP provides support for general wellness as well as help for anxiety. When anxiety gets the better of us, whether it is related to climate change or another issue, reaching out for help is always a good idea.



RESOURCES

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